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ABSTRACT

A recent survey of nearly 10,000 elementary and middle-school principals confirmed that home activities can have a dramatic impact on how well children do in school. This booklet describes ways for parents to apply the survey findings in the home. The booklet offers tips for supporting children's learning and development and for undertaking family activities that can help children succeed in school. The tips and activities relate to the family's: (1) reinforcement of children's self-esteem; (2) work habits; (3) support of academics; (4) participation in stimulating activities; (5) emphasis on language development; and (6) expectations for children's academic performance. (BC)

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The Little Things Make a Big Difference

How to help your children succeed in school

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National Association of Elementary School Principals
and
World Book Educational Products

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Dear Parents:

Today more than ever, experts agree that parents play a critical role in their children's school success. Our recent survey of nearly 10,000 elementary and middle school principals confirmed that everyday home activities can have a dramatic impact on how well children do in school.

This booklet takes our research findings and gives you easy-to-do, fun ways to apply them to your family. It includes tips and activity ideas that parents can fit into their busy lives. Underlying all of the suggestions is the understanding that you are your children's first teacher, and that your home is a most important learning place.

Can adopting these suggestions really make a difference? Absolutely. More than 98 percent of the principals said that these activities would make a significant to dramatic difference in children's success in school.

We hope that this information helps make a difference to your family.

Sincerely,

Samuel Sava, Ph. D.
Executive Director
National Association of
Elementary School Principals

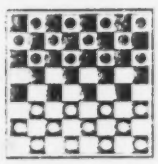
Alvin Granowsky, Ed. D.
Vice President
School and Library Services
World Book Educational Products

SIX AREAS FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

Family Reinforcement of Children's Self-Esteem

Family Work Habits

Family Support of Academics



Family Participation in Stimulating Activities

Family Emphasis on Language Development

Family Academic Expectations

FAMILY REINFORCEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SELF-ESTEEM

You might be surprised to learn that strong self-esteem may be the key to how well your children do in school. It takes a lot of confidence to raise a hand in class or tell the teacher you don't understand. It takes confidence to keep trying when you don't succeed the first time.

By reinforcing your children's self-confidence, you'll help them see themselves as capable — able to solve problems, find answers, learn new ideas, and try new ways to do things.

EVERYDAY TIPS

- Say "good job" and "I knew you could do it."
- Ask "what do you think?" — and really listen to their answers.
- Ask "what's wrong?" Let children know their feelings are important. Work out problems together.
- Pick them up when they're down. Remind them that a low school grade doesn't mean they're not smart. Make time to help them better prepare for the next assignment.
- When they ask a question, answer it right away. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Look up answers together.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Celebrate "unbirthdays" for each child — special times for just the two of you. Let your children choose the menu, decide on the best way to celebrate, and pick out some special books to read together.

Follow the leader. Help your children develop problem-solving skills by letting them take the lead in setting up a game or learning something new.

Try a new sport or hobby. Take a class. Show your children that learning isn't something you just do in school. Let them know that making mistakes is just another part of learning.

Make a treasure chest together to store your children's special projects. Show that you value your children and what they do.

Don't forget the refrigerator. Display your children's artwork and school triumphs.

FAMILY WORK HABITS

Can taking out the garbage help your children do better in school? Perhaps. Good family work habits can influence school performance. When planning and completing routine activities are a part of their day, children see that setting goals and sticking to plans can be very satisfying. Help them to say, "Look at all I accomplished!"

EVERYDAY TIPS

- It's time to study. Set a daily routine for schoolwork, meals, and bedtime.
- Beat the clock. Let your children know you and others appreciate it when they're on time.
- Turn off the television. By limiting TV time, you'll open more time for other activities.
- Work first, play later.
- It's their house, too! Get everyone to help out around the house and do chores together.
- Explain "how" and "why" for each chore.
- Encourage your children to suggest other ways of doing household jobs, and try "their way."

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Make a family calendar. Set a day and time each week for updating the schedule for the week — add children's doctor appointments, music lessons, team practices, deadlines for homework or tests, events, family outings. Have older children add updates on their own.

Have children help plan, shop for and prepare dinner one night a week or month. The sight of the finished meal on the table will reward their planning and efforts. Serve extra helpings of praise.

Do your "homework" while your children do their assignments — balance your checkbook, pay bills, fold laundry. Show that "we're all in this together." When you're finished, reward yourselves with a game or a treat.

Give even young children their own jobs to do. Make taking out the garbage, feeding the family pet or setting the dinner table an ongoing responsibility.

Help children learn to use their own alarm clocks. That way, they'll be on their own to stick to their schedules.

FAMILY SUPPORT OF ACADEMICS

By showing an interest in your children's schoolwork, you're demonstrating that their education is important to you. Your upbeat attitude toward school will make your children excited about learning.

EVERYDAY TIPS

- Say "tell me about it." Learn what your children are doing in school. Encourage them to explain their assignments.
- Beat the "why do I need to learn this?" blues. Show children how their schoolwork applies to their lives.
- Let them know, "I'm here if you need me." Be available during study times, even if it's just by phone.
- Play detective. Help children search out answers to homework questions.
- Get the tools for the job. Make sure your children have a dictionary and other reference materials available, and a quiet, well-lit place to study at home.
- Hit the books. Go to the library together for research projects.

- Talk with teachers. Get to know your children's teachers and talk with them about what you can do to help at home.
- Go to school. Try to attend open houses, conferences, plays and other activities at school.

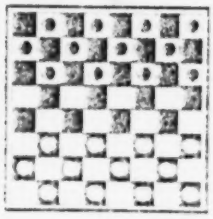
ACTIVITY IDEAS

Let children play teacher. Encourage your children to teach something they've learned to you or a younger brother or sister.

Introduce yourself to your children's teachers in person or by phone. And ask the teacher for specific suggestions for helping if your children have difficulties.

Encourage your children's interests in subjects like baseball or dinosaurs — go beyond schoolwork. Look for library books on the subjects and do research in reference resources just for fun. Encourage your children to make up stories or plays and to draw pictures. Or see a movie related to the topic.

Make a "school corner" for studying. A space as small as a corner tabletop can hold reference books and other school-related materials.



FAMILY PARTICIPATION IN STIMULATING ACTIVITIES

Only a fraction of what your children learn comes from their time in the classroom. Home and community activities help children grow, and reinforce concepts they're learning in school.

EVERYDAY TIPS

- Get the library habit. Libraries hold a world of information. Make a trip to the local library a weekly routine.
- Help with hobbies. They're a great way to expand your children's learning...and they may last a lifetime.
- Make it a game. Once a week, play board and word games together.
- Be on the lookout. Watch for local fairs and community events to attend as a family.
- Explore beyond your own backyard. Take advantage of the parks in your area, find out what's new at the zoo and check out the local museums.
- Take walks together. Discuss what you see along the way.
- Encourage TV talk. Watch TV programs together and talk about the characters or plot during the commercials.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Look for special events and activities all year long. Start with the local newspaper or call the community tourism office, park district or chamber of commerce. Watch for open houses at the fire station, police station and post office. Visit neighborhood stores, such as the bakery and shoe repair. Tour your local newspaper facilities. Check to see if any factories in your area offer tours.

Get library cards for the whole family, and find out what services the library offers. Most have special events and story times for children.

Take a walking tour of your neighborhood or a nearby town together. Check out the architecture, people and activities.

Open your eyes. Look together at the sky, the trees, the flowers, the water. Have children describe what they see in the shapes of the clouds or stars.

Become explorers. Make a map of your neighborhood with your children, talking about directions and how to get to favorite places. Display a map of your area, state, the country or the world. Refer to it when questions come up.

Pack a lunch and take a driving (or train, subway or bus) trip to give your children a chance to see and learn about the world beyond their neighborhood or town. Work with your children to chart your trip, and talk about interesting things you pass on the way.

FAMILY EMPHASIS ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

So much of education depends on the ability to read, to listen well, and to express ideas clearly — both in speaking and writing. That's why your emphasis on developing a rich vocabulary and on reading is so important.

EVERYDAY TIPS

- Talk, talk, talk...with your children as you go about your daily routines.
- Make story time a regular part of the day. Read to your children, and encourage them to read to you or tell stories.
- Go beyond books. Try to have a variety of reading materials at home — books, newspapers and magazines.
- Watch out for "do as I say, not as I do." Be a reader yourself and let your children see you read.
- Look up words or topics together.
- Show that writing is fun. Encourage children to write from the time they can sound out words and have younger children dictate "writing" to you and make their marks on paper.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

"Shop talk" with your children. Use a visit to the supermarket, hardware store or shopping center to build vocabulary and learn about new things.

Read books to your children that may be above their reading level, or classics that they might not otherwise read. like *Charlotte's Web, Treasure Island,* or *Grimm's Fairy Tales.*

Make long car trips go faster by borrowing books-on-tape from the library.

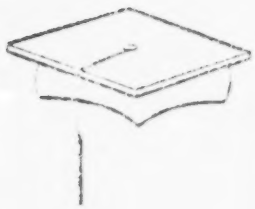
Play word games like "20 Questions" and "I Spy" — one player uncovers the identity of a person, place or thing by asking questions.

Find "good reads" for children by checking with your librarian or school.

Give a subscription to a favorite magazine for a birthday or holiday gift. Use books as rewards on special occasions. Build your children's own little personal library, and show that books are cherished possessions.

Make original greeting cards or books. Encourage children to create individual messages and artwork. Use their masterpieces as gifts to relatives and friends.

Have children become pen pals with a favorite aunt or faraway cousin, or help them join a pen pal program. Give them stamps, envelopes and an inexpensive writing pad.



FAMILY ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

You want your children to do their best in school, but do they know your expectations? Talk to them about what you expect, and let them know why learning is a priority and why it's important for them to do their best.

EVERYDAY TIPS

- Set high but realistic standards. Recognize that each child is different.
- Help your children aim high, and set goals.
- Give them a pat on the back for a job well done.
- Ask "how's it going?" Show you're interested in their progress.
- Let them know how important education is.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Find out who your children admire, from their grandparents and teachers to sports stars and the President. Then talk about why they admire them, and discuss what it took for these people to be successful.

Ask what they want to do when they grow up and show support for their interest in careers or higher education. Do some casual research together on different occupations or even try to meet with someone who has that job.

Take your children to work one day. Or visit a friend or relative on the job at an airport, a courtroom, a restaurant, gas station, office, factory, newsroom or store. Talk about what it took to prepare for various jobs.

Tackle a new challenge on your own. Don't let children have all the fun. Take a computer course or additional job training — anything that interests you. Show them that learning continues as they grow up.

WHAT PRINCIPALS WANT PARENTS TO KNOW

All of the learning suggestions in this booklet are important. But some are essential. According to a survey of 10,000 elementary and middle school principals, the most important ways parents can help their children learn are:

- Listen and talk with your children, paying consistent attention to questions and feelings.
- Show pride in your children's academic growth and accomplishments.
- Regularly encourage children with their schoolwork.
- Instill a strong work ethic in children.
- Help children perceive themselves as capable problem solvers.
- Give priority to schoolwork, reading and other academic activities over non-academic endeavors like television, music, videos and recreation.
- Emphasize regular, planned use of time in the home for studying, playing and eating meals.
- Read aloud to your children, and have them read to you.
- Set standards and expectations for your children.

- Get to know your children's current schoolwork and school activities.
- Help with homework when needed.
- Encourage regular discussions with your children and find opportunities to enlarge vocabulary and sentence patterns.
- Get to know your children's academic strengths and weaknesses.
- Make structure, routine and punctuality priorities for activities at home.
- Make frequent use of books, newspapers and periodicals.
- Have a quiet place for your children to study at home, with appropriate reference materials available for use.

All of these behaviors were rated essential or highly desirable by at least 85 percent of the principals surveyed. They cut across all categories of the survey and are listed in order of priority.

INTERESTED IN MORE INFORMATION?

Get the 15-minute videotape, "The Little Things Make a Big Difference," offering parents expert advice and practical activities to help their children succeed in school. Cost is $19.95 (25% discount for National Association of Elementary School Principals members), or you may order bulk copies of this brochure.

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